

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### VISITS TO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES APPROACHED 18,000,000 MARK LAST YEAR

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton announced today that a record number of visits--almost 18,000,000--were made by people to national wildlife refuges last year. The system is operated by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service.

Visitors came for diverse reasons, but nearly two-thirds pursued some activity directly related to wildlife. Hunting and fishing, however, were not as popular as birdwatching, photography, and auto tours. About a third of the visitors fished while hunting, where authorized, attracted about 4 percent.

Apart from wildlife watching, boating was the most popular recreation, with picnicking not too far behind. Large numbers of people came for a multitude of other reasons, ranging from camping (on refuges that permit it) to winter sports.

Total visitations were recorded at 17,871,680, more than 1,500,000 higher than in 1969, on the 218 areas where public use can be allowed. There are 330 refuges consisting of nearly 30 million acres in 46 States, but many of the offshore bird nesting rocks, extensive areas in Alaska, and some waterfowl production areas in the Dakotas are not suited for public visits.

Despite increasing human use, managers make sure the primary purpose of refuges--habitat for wildlife--is not jeopardized. Public use is encouraged through interpretive centers--wildlife trails and observation towers.

The five most popular refuges were:

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in parts of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, with 1.7 million visitors in 1970. Attractions include migrating waterfowl--swans, ducks, geese, herons, egrets, bitterns, and rails, plus some bald eagles. The long river valley has muskrat, mink, beaver, otter, raccoon, skunk, weasel, fox, squirrels, cottontails, deer, and 40 smaller nongame animals. Also famous for historical and archeological lore.

Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in southern Illinois, 1.6 million visitors, with geese and ducks, whitetail deer, wild turkey, and bobwhite quail. Three lakes provide fishing, swimming, boating, and camping.

Santee National Wildlife Refuge in central South Carolina, 1.4 million visitors, a winter area for waterfowl using Atlantic Flyway and habitat for fur animals, deer, quail. One of the best fishing areas in the country for land-locked striped bass, crappies, bluegills, and catfish.

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Oklahoma, 1.1 million visitors, with bison and elk grazing on the open range, plus long-horn cattle, whitetail deer, elk, and prairie dogs--as well as more than 200 kinds of birds, including wild turkeys. Fishing for bass, sunfish, crappies, and catfish in at least 20 lakes, which serve also for swimming, camping and picnicking.

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia, 824,000 visitors, famed for ponies and wintering home for ducks, geese, swans. Many shorebirds, egrets, herons, and ibises, plus exotic sika deer. Ocean fishing good for red drum, whiting, kingfish, flounder, black drum, bluefish. One of the best sandy beaches along the east coast, refuge also has spring art show, annual summer pony roundup.

The most famous refuges, however, probably are Aransas on the Texas gulf coast, wintering home of all the world's whooping cranes, and Okefenokee, the 350,000-acre reality of Pogo's comic-strip swamp.

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